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DURA-EUPOPOS AND ITS CONNECTIONS WITH IRANIAN MESOPOTAMIA

As it is well known, the works of M. Rostovtzeff contributed to a large extent to the elaboration of the historical picture of Dura-Europos. According to the theory elucidated several times by Rostovtzeff, Dura-Europos was one of the important "caravan cities" of Mesopotamia which owed their wealth and flourishing to the trade passing through them. Dura-Europos was situated on the caravan route passing along the Euphrates, being probably an important station of the trade which was carried on from the Persian Gulf to North Syria. From the view-point of economic geography Rostovtzeff's conception at least seems to be correct, though the question remains, to what extent did the political history influence the role of the city in Mesopotamian trade. In this respect, Rostovtzeff is of the opinion that the "caravan city" character of Dura-Europos did principally exist under Parthian rule, when it functioned as an important Parthian border city and residence of the Parthian satrap of Parapotamia and could have been an important centre of the caravan route leading along the Euphrates during the more or less peaceful two centuries. This period which meant prosperity and wealth to the city, according to him came to an end with the Roman conquest. From then on, the surpressive presence of the Roman garrison weighed heavily on Dura, in addition to which trade directed towards the Persian Gulf was more transferred to the desert route, crossing Palmyra. Under these circumstances the trade connections of Dura-Europos shrank to its own direct vicinity and was almost limited exclusively to supplying the needs of the Roman garrison. "Dura was dying before the Sassanians killed it".¹

Now if we examine the source material related to the history of Dura-Europos, we will be astonished to find that the historical concept of Rostovtzeff rests a good deal on general economic and geographical arguments than on concrete evidence of the sources. The epigraphic, papyrological, numismatic and archaeological source material, become known up to now, give only information of limited character concerning the trade relations of the city's population. We know from written sources that the countryside from the Euphrates up to the river Khabur and its fertile surroundings

belonged to the city's estate district.² Thus, it is selfevident that we find numerous data in inscriptions, papyri, parchments about the trade and business connections of the cities like Nabagata, Appadana, Banabela, Ossa, Paliga and Dura-Europos, situated in this region.³ However, we do not hear about trade connections with other distant cities, especially with those situated in the southern part of Mesopotamia.

The numismatic finds of Dura aid us somewhat more in this question. Though from the accurate investigation of A. R. Bellinger⁴ it becomes evident that under Seleucid and Parthian rule the circulating currency was Antiochian in Dura-Europos which after the Parthian conquest could only enter Dura through trade channels, they also refer to commercial ties with Carrhae, Palmyra, Soloi, Tarsos. It is even more noteworthy that under Parthian rule the currency of Seleucia, situated on the banks of the Tigris river, also appear in Dura.⁵ This clearly reflects that Dura-Europos had, at least under Parthian rule actual trade relations with cities situated in the southern region of Mesopotamia, too.

However, after the Roman conquest, the currencies of the Parthian rulers and Seleucia disappear, their place being taken totally by the officially issued Roman currencies and the coins of the cities of Asia Minor and Syria, under Roman rule. Only the currency of the first Sassanian rulers, Ardayšahr and Šāhpūhr appear later, but again in a limited quantity. It seems thus, as if the currency circulation vindicates in reality the historical picture drawn by Rostovtzeff: with the Roman conquest Dura-Europos ceased to be a "caravan city", from this point on it was only a border-castle, where Roman currency flowed in great quantity to supply the garrison and not as a result of commercial transactions.

In this respect a recently published inscription from Dura gains decisive importance.⁶ The inscription of a potsherd, which was found most likely in Tower No. 19, can be read according to C. B. Welles, as follows:

O. Yale Inv. 38 μ φ', 'Από ΒΗΘ
ΔΑΡΡΑΙΟΣ

Welles had already thought that in the word ΒΗΘΔΑΡΡΑΙΟΣ we are dealing with a toponym, but could refer from classical sources only to *gens Darae* (n. h. VI 32, 150), mentioned by Pliny the Elder and which can be localized to the western side of the Persian Gulf, thus being incapable of identifying this name form. However, in Eastern sources this is a well-known Mesopotamian toponym, of which the form ΒΗΘΔΑΡΡΑΙΟΣ is an accurate Greek transcription. In the Acts of Persian Martyrs, preserved in Syrian language, there occurs *Bēṭ-Dērāyē* (*byt-dry'*)⁷ which from 420 A. D. was a Nestorian episcopal see. In the form *Bēṭ-Dērāyē byldryy* it occurs in a Middle Persian Manichaean text.⁸ This locality, with *Bēṭ-Kusāyē* and Upper, Middle and Lower *Nahravān* belonged to the province of *an-Nahravānūt* and was situated east of Ctesiphon on the left bank of the Tigris.

The form ΒΗΘΔΑΡΡΑΙΟΣ is a transcription of the name *Bēṭ-Dērāyē*, or one of its Semitic variants (cf. Arabic *Bādarāyā*) enrolled into the group

of locality names ending with *-oç*, which the writer of the record on the potsherd used uninflected. Thus the whole inscription can be interpreted as follows:

“(In) the 540th (Year),
from *Bēθ-Dārāyē*.”

The pot evidently contained a commodity that was transported to Dura from *Bēθ-Dārāyē*. Accordingly, this inscription furnishes new and valuable information regarding trade carried on between Dura-Europos and the cities of Southern Mesopotamia. This information gains more importance, if we take into consideration its date.

The 540th year of the Seleucid Era corresponds to 228/229 A. D. Accordingly, even under Roman rule, Dura-Europos preserved its commercial ties with Mesopotamia which was under Parthian domination! This unexpected fact may lead us to the conclusion that we cannot regard the Roman conquest of Dura from the point of view of its commercial position, as such a decisive element, as did Rostovtzeff. It is highly probable that caravan-trade flourished in Dura after the Roman conquest, too, and on the basis of our inscription, the ties with Iranian Mesopotamia of the city did not cease to exist at least till 228/229. The explanation of the fact that in this period currency originating from Parthian territory has not been found, possibly lies in that Roman currency, as means of transaction, gradually spreads in the East, thus pressing out, at least in the commercial circulation of Dura, the issues of Parthian rulers or the Greek cities of Parthia.

This inscription from Dura provides us still with another interesting historical lesson. By 228/229, Mesopotamia had already for years been the part of the newly formed Sassanian Empire. The rise to power of the dynasty thus did not bring about the termination of the caravan trade along the Euphrates. This presumably happened only when in 231 A. D. Ardaššahr initiated the attack against the Roman Empire. The attack of the Persians and later the counter-offensive mounted by Alexander Severus in 232 A. D. caused severe disturbance in caravan trade, nevertheless the coins of Ardaššahr and his successor, Šāhpuhr, appearing in Dura-Europos testify to the fact that the commercial ties of the city with Iranian Mesopotamia did not cease completely in the ensuing period either.

¹ cf. *M. I. Rostovtzeff*: YCS 5 (1935) p. 200 sq.; and *Dura-Europos and its Art*. Oxford 1938. p. 20 sq., p. 30 sq., the quotation on p. 31. 1.

² *J. Harmatta*: *AntTan* 3 (1956) p. 162 sq., *Acta Ant. Hung.* 5 (1957) p. 306 sq., 6 (1958) p. 164 sq.

³ cf. *C. B. Welles*: *The Excavation at Dura-Europos. Preliminary Report of the Seventh and Eight Seasons of Work 1933-1934 and 1934-1935*. New Haven 1939. p. 437 sqq. and *C. B. Welles-R. O. Fink-J. F. Gilliam*: *The Excavation at Dura-Europos. Final Report V. Part I. The Parchments and Papyri*. New Haven 1959. *Passim*.

⁴ *A. R. Bellinger*: *The Excavations at Dura-Europos. Final Report VI. The Coins*. New 1949. p. 196 sq., p. 203.

⁵ *A. R. Bellinger*, o. c. p. 141 seqq.

⁶ cf. *C. B. Welles*: YCS 14 (1955) p. 185.

⁷ *G. Hoffmann*: Auszüge aus syrischen Akten persischer Märtyrer. Leipzig 1880. AfKM VII. 3. p. 67., p. 69.

⁸ *W. B. Henning*: BSOS 10 (1939–42) p. 945.